

Approved For Release 1999/08/08 : CIA-RDP82-00457R001800550005-1

CONFIDENTIAL

COUNTRY Anglo-Egyptian Sudan

DATE DISTR. 27 August 1948

SUBJECT Rivalry between the Two Sayyids,
al-Mirghani and al-Mahdi

NO. OF PAGES 4

PLACE 25X1A

ACQUIRED

NO. OF ENCLS.
(LISTED BELOW)

DATE OF IN

SUPPLEMENT TO
REPORT NO.

25X1X

Political Position of Sayyid Sir Ali al-Mirghani Pasha

1. The increasing influence of Sayyid Sir Ali al-Mirghani Pasha's Khatmia Sunni Moslem sect has forced this essentially religious order into a position of more and more political significance. Although Mirghani himself is politically apathetic, nationalist political groups, aided by the common religious and cultural links of Islam, have invaded the Khatmia to impose pro-unity, pan-Islamic viewpoints, against the will of Mirghani. Seizing this opportunity, the Egyptians have come increasingly to identify the Khatmia with the Unity of the Nile Valley movement, thus giving the erroneous impression that Mirghani stands for the union of the Sudan with Egypt.
2. Mirghani has professed in vain that the Khatmia is not a political party and that the common links between his disciples are purely religious ties. He has exhorted his supporters to be guided by the policies of their respective political parties and has confirmed the right of every member of his sect to follow his own beliefs. However, to confuse the Khatmia followers, pro-unity political agitators countered with the propaganda that the Khatmia had begun to organize, under the supervision of distinguished leaders who were not previously known to have been involved in politics, and these agitators claimed that a political party would be created which would openly uphold Egypt.
3. Conveniently entrenched in the Khatmia, the pro-unity parties have gained effective control of the orientation of the sect with regard to political issues, thus presenting the Khatmia as the champion of the Unity of the Nile Valley movement and the protector of the Sudan's rights in its dispute with Great Britain. Whenever pro-unity-inspired demonstrations have taken place against the British administration, the populace has taken refuge in Mirghani's compound when the police dispersed the crowds.
4. So long as Mirghani's position was merely that of a religious leader, Khatmia received the protection of the Sudan Government, which accorded him more than one British title, in addition to honorary membership in the Northern Sudan Advisory Council. Today, although Mirghani continues to receive a direct British contribution estimated at ££4,000 per annum, the British view with apprehension the growing political appeal of the Khatmia and its entanglement in the pro-unity plot. It is partly to arrest this religious-political march of the Khatmia that the British have followed a policy of strengthening the

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ CLASSIFICATION CONTROL U.S. OFFICIALS ONLY

[illegible]

Document No.

NO CHANGE in Class. ☐

☐ DECLASSIFIED

Class. CHANGED TO: TS S C

DDA Memo, 4 Apr 77

Auth: DDA REG. 77/1763

By: 033

CONFIDENTIAL SECRET OFFICIALS ONLY

25X1A

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

- 2 -

political position of Sayyid Sir Abd-al-Rahman al-Mahdi Pasha.

25X1A

Comment. The Khatmia is the offspring of the Idrisia or Ahmedia Sunni sect which was introduced from Morocco. The followers of the Idrisia today are to be found in Dongola and Berber. Connected with the Idrisia, and the best known and most influential sect (tariqa) in the Sudan at present, is the Khatmia, which was founded by Sayyid Muhammad Osman al-Kabir of the Hejaz. The present head is Sayyid Sir Ali al-Marghani Pasha. There is a branch of the Khatmia called Imailia, with followers in Kordofan and Debba; its present head is Sheikh Mirghani al-Sayyid al-Mak.)

Extent of Mirghani's Egyptian Affiliation

5. The common links of Islam have led Mirghani and his Khatmia leaders to cultivate and maintain relations with the Egyptian al-Azhar and other religious organizations. This, in turn, has inspired friendship between the Khatmia and Egyptian political leaders, which the Egyptians have exploited fully. Mirghani's particular sympathy for the Wafd was demonstrated when he sent a telegram to Nahhas to congratulate him for escaping the most recent attempt on his life. In thanking Mirghani for his telegram, Nahhas expressed the hope that "God may strengthen our links and preserve our mutual love."
6. The recent visits of Nefissa, Mirghani's daughter, and his nephew, Sayyid Muhammad Osman al-Mirghani, to Cairo were occasions for rejoicing and ceremony in Egypt. When Osman visited Cairo in June, several Egyptian Cabinet members, as well as Nahhas, Salah Harb, and the Sudanese delegation, were at the station to greet him. This manifestation was interpreted by pro-unity circles as evidence of the esteem the Egyptians had for Mirghani.

Political Position of Sayyid Sir Abd-al-Rahman al-Mahdi Pasha

7. Added to the increasing prestige of Abd-al-Rahman al-Mahdi Pasha as an important leader of an independent Moslem semi-religious order, is his new political standing as head of the Sudan Independence Front. Anxious to stabilize religious and political dissensions in the Sudan, the British have used the Mahdi's growing influence to neutralize the religious-political appeal of Mirghani's Khatmia. By dominating the pro-government Independence Front political parties, the Mahdi has successfully opposed the combined efforts of the pro-unity parties.
8. In order to strengthen the Mahdi's position, the Administration has helped him to develop his White Nile cotton plantation on Abba Island. His income in 1947 was estimated to have reached LE 1,500,000.
9. The Mahdi organized the Sudan Independence Front with the approval of the Administration. This organization has acted as a bulwark against the infiltration of Egyptian nationalism. Support by the leading tribal chiefs has materially simplified the Mahdi's program, and the Administration has benefited thereby.
10. In addition to controlling the Sudan Independence Front, the Mahdi's Umma Party organized the Ansar Youth. This new group has become the strong-arm instrument of the Mahdi and has been used on special occasions for the purposes of coercion and intimidation. The Ansar Youth are well organized, have their own uniforms, and a clubhouse in Omdurman.

CONFIDENTIAL CONTROL U.S. OFFICIALS ONLY**CONFIDENTIAL**

11. Two daily papers, En Nil and Al-Umma, represent the interests of the Mahdi and expound the viewpoint of the Umma Party and the Independence Front.
12. Members of the Mahdi clan have become bitterly anti-Egyptian, as they fear they would lose their authority and fortunes under Egyptian rule. The Mahdi's primary concern at present is to prolong the status quo in the Sudan.
13. In addition to his two sons, Siddiq and Hadi, the Mahdi's family comprises the following individuals who are actively engaged in various phases of his work: Sayyids Yaqub al-Hilu, member of the Northern Sudan Advisory Council; Muhammad Muhammad; Abdallah al-Fadil al-Mahdi; al-Hadi Abd-al-Rahman al-Mahdi; and al-Fadil al-Misha al-Mahdi. His most trusted associate is his eldest son Sayyid Siddiq al-Mahdi. Siddiq went to the United States in the summer of 1947 to represent the Sudan Independence Front at the UN Security Council, in support of the Sudan Government in the Anglo-Egyptian dispute. Siddiq is ambitious and dreams of becoming King of the Sudan, on the assumption that his father will secure the reins of government. The Mahdi's second son, by a second wife, is Sayyid Hadi al-Mahdi. Both of the Mahdi's sons often go on inspection tours of the provinces or their cotton plantations. During their tours they usually receive much publicity and large ovations from Umma adherents. These visits serve to maintain liaison with tribal chiefs who are mostly the Mahdi's men.

Rivalry Between al-Mahdi and al-Mirghani

14. Finding himself more through circumstances than by choice in the opposite camp to the Mahdi, Mirghani has been increasingly subjected to the attacks of the Umma Party leaders, who resent the intrusion of the Khatmia in political affairs.
15. Reasonably assured of the protection of the British administration, the Khatmia leadership has advised Mirghani that, in the eyes of the British, both he and the Mahdi occupy an equal position, both being honorary members of the Northern Sudan Advisory Council and having received similar titles and honors from the British Government. For this reason the Khatmia leaders do not feel that the ambition of the Mahdi to secure the reins of government will be realized. When the Umma recently criticized the cultivation of friendly relations by Mirghani and members of his family with Egypt, the Khatmia warned that, unless these attacks on Mirghani were stopped, the friction between the two Sayyids might lead to civil war.
16. The most important point of dispute has been the stand of the two Sayyids with respect to the recent constitutional reforms introduced in the government (the Legislative Assembly and the Executive Council). Prior to starting the discussions on the proposals in the Northern Sudan Advisory Council Meeting, the Governor General summoned Mirghani and the Mahdi to the palace, to pave the way for prompt approval of the measure. The government also asked the two Sayyids, in their capacity as honorary Council members, to submit written reports of their views on the proposed reforms. An affirmative reply from the Mahdi was a foregone conclusion, but there was considerable doubt with regard to Mirghani's reply. The Ashiqqah Party demanded an investigation into the cause of the delay of Mirghani's answer, claiming that Mirghani's reply to the Secretary of the Northern Sudan Advisory Council had been received by the Secretary a month late. There was much speculation concerning Mirghani's position, which was further intensified when he did not attend the session of the Advisory Council.

CONFIDENTIAL
SECRET

SECRET CONTROL U.S. OFFICIALS ONLY

CONFIDENTIAL
SECRET

- 4 -

17. When the Advisory Council approved the proposed reforms as anticipated, the Administration hastened to declare that the representation of both Mahdists and Mirghanists inside the Advisory Council had agreed to the Legislative Assembly Ordinance. This statement seemed to indicate certain doubts on the part of the Administration, as there are only two members of the Khatmia in the Advisory Council. One is Mirghani himself, who failed to attend the session and who could not have spoken for the Khatmia, as an honorary member of the Council; the other member was nominated by the Omdurman Municipal Council. The Mahdists and the Administration, therefore, had things very much as they wished.
18. Mirghani's absence from the Council meetings was quickly interpreted by the pro-unity parties and the Egyptian interests as indicating that the Sayyid had rejected the setting up of an Assembly and that he was on a protest strike and did not approve of other constitutional reforms proposed by the government. According to the Ashiqqah Party, Mirghani in his reply to the Sudan Government had stated that his advice on the eve of the creation of the Advisory Council had been disregarded. He thought that the Council did not represent Sudanese public opinion and now that this Council had approved the proposals it certainly did not express the views of the Sudanese people. Although Mirghani's real reply remained a mystery, Khatmia sources agreed that the Sayyid's views were necessarily vague as he maintained that he was strictly a religious man and that he had no specific opinion on the subject.
19. On 22 June 1948 the Umma issued a statement which reflected the stand of the Mahdi with regard to the constitutional reforms as follows:

"We believe that the loyal Sudanese could render a great service to their country through these institutions (the proposed Legislative Assembly and the Executive Council). We want to invite all the political parties to form a United Front which would work toward the restoration of the sovereignty of the Sudan. We register our appreciation for the action taken by the Governor General and the Sudan Government in enacting these laws under the present circumstances. We also want to register our admiration of the position of the British Government in empowering the Governor General to take such a practical step toward the self-government of the Sudan."

SECRET/CONTROL U.S. OFFICIALS ONLY

SECRET